

ART «» ENTERTAINMENT

BOOKS

Sometimes a woman is safer on the street

"Serious conflict [may] tear a marriage apart. If that conflict expresses itself violently, the woman as the physically weaker partner is most apt to bear the physical brunt of the ordeal."

BATTERED WIVES

By Del Martin

Glide Publications, 330 Ellis, San Francisco, 94102

\$6.95, 288 pp.

"Because of the increase in the crime of rape ... American women are often advised to 'stay at home where they won't get hurt.' But people ... might change their tune if they had access to local police reports ... which suggest that women may be even less safe in their homes than they are in the streets."

Battered Wives, from which the above is quoted, deals with a problem that is only beginning to force its way into public consciousness: physical violence directed against women by the men they live with, in or out of wedlock.

The author, Del Martin, is a long-time activist in the feminist movement, founder of La Casa de las Madres (San Francisco), and recently appointed co-ordinator of the National Task Force on Battered Wives and Household Violence of NOW (National Organization of Women).

Martin was recently interviewed by *In These Times* correspondent Sam Silver in San Francisco where she currently serves as chairperson of the city's Commission on the Status of Women.

►Master/slave relationship.

Asked why it has taken so long for the extent and seriousness of the problem to be revealed, Martin had a number of explanations.

First is the reluctance of the victimized woman to talk. "Women have always been blamed for anything that goes wrong in a marriage," Martin says. "It's

her responsibility to keep that marriage together. Its failure is her failure. Naturally she doesn't want to talk about it." And even if she does talk, if she turns for help to the police or the courts, she is often blamed for the assault and stigmatized for what has happened to her.

The current interest in child abuse and in rape has changed the situation to a degree. And the woman's movement has given some victims the courage to speak out. "Women have shared experiences. [in consciousness-raising sessions] and found out that theirs is a common problem."

Asked what she believes to be the cause of the problem, Martin pointed to the "master/slave relationship prevalent in marriage."

"The roles of 'wife' and 'husband' ... developed with the patriarchal nuclear family.... Men are seen as dominant (and thus strong, active, rational, authoritarian, aggressive and stable), and women as dependent (and thus submissive, passive and non-rational).... In modern society, ... both men and women are having difficulty living up to these artificially determined roles.... Serious conflict between social expectation and personal preference [may] tear a marriage apart. If that conflict expresses itself violently, the woman as the physically weaker partner is most apt to bear the physical brunt of the ordeal," she says in her book.

►Real danger.

One of the questions most frequently asked of Martin is, "Why doesn't a beaten wife leave her husband?" The answer: "The victim is usually dependent upon her assailant. If she has no

Del Martin, author of *Battered Wives*.

Photo by Sam Silver

skills and never has had any training, she has no way to earn a living for herself and her children. She has no place to go.

"Say she flees for her life and goes to the welfare office for assistance. The first thing they ask her is, 'How much money does your husband make?' His salary will probably disqualify her for relief. And they say, 'You've got a place to go; go home.' No one considers the danger that may involve."

How real is the danger? "That depends. Violence may begin with a shove or a slap. But every time it occurs, it becomes worse. We're talking about full-fledged beatings, broken bones, bleeding wounds." The fear of death and, in some instances, the reality.

Is there a correlation between military training and domestic violence? Martin says there is. "The Eisenberg-Micklow study

and others show that men who have been in the military are more prone to domestic violence. And this is also true of the police.

"We have information that would indicate that in California we have at least one police chief who is a wife-beater, and another who is president of a police officers' association." So when a victim calls her local police station for help, she may be inviting another wife-beater into her home.

►Practical advice.

What practical advice does Del Martin have for battered wives? A great deal, most of which is set forth in her book. There are chapters that give a background understanding: "The Batterer—What Makes Him a Brute?" "The Victim—Why Does She Stay?" "The Failure of the Legal System" and "Social Services—The Big Runaround." There are

chapters on "Survival Tactics," suggestions for "Remedial Legislation;" and most practical of all, "Refuges for Battered Women"—where they can stay while they pull themselves together and make plans—when and if they take the first step toward helping themselves.

Martin has one further suggestion:

"In the beginning of my book there is a letter from a battered wife whose husband is a prominent physician. She documented her case and put it in the hands of some women. She told them that if anything were to happen to her, she wanted it made public. Then she told her husband what she had done.

"He has not laid a hand on her in over a year. This indicates to me that if a man has something to lose, he can easily control his rage."

SIMONE WEIL: A LIFE

By Simone Petrement

Pantheon Books, \$15, 577 pp.

Simone Petrement was a life-long friend of Simone Weil, and had access to Weil's papers. Despite her intimate knowledge of her subject, or because of it, Ms. Petrement is splendidly modest: she will say, I think when Simone wrote this she may have been feeling so-and-so, or, perhaps what Simone had in mind was such-and-such. Petrement's modesty makes one aware how characteristically overconfident are the judgments of historians and biographers.

But what the reader thinks about this book will depend, of course, on his or her reaction to this philosopher/activist. Simone Weil must have been, and in death still is, very irritating. Beginning as something close to a Marxist, she ended very nearly a Catholic. Yet she declined to take the sacraments for which she longed in the belief that the

church would require her to give up her conviction that Platonism and many other philosophies proclaimed essentially the same truth as Catholicism.

Upper-middle-class in background and tastes, Weil sought to practice what she preached by working in a factory (for part of one year) and restricting herself to what was available to working people. The result was heroic or ludicrous, depending on one's point of view. Manually awkward and short-sighted in addition to everything else, Weil could not sustain her initiatives. In the factory, she could not make the piecework norms. In the Spanish Civil War, she stepped

in a low pot in which oil was heating and badly burned herself. In World War II, when she refused to eat more than the diet generally available in France, she died at age 34.

Moreover, Weil irritates in the manner of people just a bit brighter than oneself. On a memorable occasion when she encountered Leon Trotsky, Trotsky's wife was heard to exclaim in astonishment that the lady was holding her own. In her essay "Are We Heading for the Proletarian Revolution?" written in 1933 when she was 22, Weil sets forth conclusions which many of us in the new left took decades to arrive at. (This essay together

with other political essays by Weil is available in English in *Oppression and Liberty*, University of Massachusetts Press.)

As for myself, I admire Simone Weil profoundly. She had the intellectual power to fasten on the essential element in a situation and was right about one essential after another: the character of the Soviet Union; the meaning of Hitler's accession to power; the unpreparedness of the working class in capitalist societies to assume state power. More extraordinary, she put the whole weight of her life behind whatever at each stage in her development she considered thus to be essential.

For me, the ludicrousness, the awkwardness, the occasional insensitivity as to the effects of her acts on others, are the attributes of this commitment. Like the new left, which she influenced through Camus and *Politics* magazine, Simone Weil demythologized Marxism and invited us to fasten on elemental facts, such as liberty, fraternity, craftsmanship, violence. I cannot follow her religious journey, either intellectually or in life, but I note that A.J. Muste underwent a similar experience at about the same time, and like Weil, came to feel that violence was the single most important political fact of the 20th century.

Of some persons it is true that no matter what one finally thinks about them, one is the better for having been in their presence. Simone Weil is such a person.

—Staughton Lynd

Staughton Lynd publishes a regular column on "Labor and the Law" in *In These Times*.

Simone Weil: She grasped the essence and acted on it



Ben Vereen as "Chicken George"

Eighty million Americans watch *Roots* on TV

Last week America, black and white, confronted its racist past on nationwide TV.

Eighty million people watched ABC's week long dramatization of Alex Haley's *Roots*, more people than watched the Superbowl or *Gone With the Wind*. As a commentator said on Thursday, after this TV will never be the same. Probably not. If money can be made by depicting slavery from the point of view of blacks, prime time is due for a new set of issues.

Techniques from every kind of Hollywood film went into *Roots*, especially those from Westerns. But with a difference. This time it was blacks who were shown as heroes and heroines, and the slaveowners of the South were, for once, painted in something like their true colors. "The Triumph of an American Family" used America's most popular cultural form to repudiate one of America's most pervasive ideas—racism.

It even made good points about sexism. There were portraits

of strong black women. Rape of black women by white men was shown as a common and terrorizing aspect of the Old South. A white woman explained to her obviously more intelligent slave that she guessed God made all white folks smarter than black ones, "just like he made men smarter than women."

When *Roots* topped *Gone With the Wind*, it was more than just ratings. It was the image of a strong, heroic black family edging out the myth of contented "darkies" under slavery.

Roots, too, is the stuff of myth. It gives America a new set of popular ideals.

Like the Western, it might be accused of making its characters larger than life. Not all blacks emerging from slavery were as merciful as Tom Harvey who, in the final episode, declines to whip the white who has humiliated and beaten him. Blacks, too, sometimes committed desperate and inhumane acts. Yet it's a better myth, closer to the truth about slavery, and much

closer to the realities all Americans need to face about themselves.

Sixty years ago D. W. Griffiths made cinema history with *Birth of a Nation*. He showed what film could do as a new art form, but his content was post-Reconstruction Southern, including heroic Ku Klux Klaners. *Roots*, on the other hand, breaks no new artistic ground, but its viewpoint on black history, never before expressed on prime time TV, has, as Haley says, changed the culture of America.

It's a story that reveals clearly how, as one white character in *Roots* remarks, property is power, and always will be.

—Judy MacLean

In These Times will print in upcoming issues a broad spectrum of reactions to the TV showing of *Roots*. Included will be the experience of teachers—school and college—who used the material of the book and TV show in class; civil rights activists, black and white; as well as historians.

The executives who control what America sees and hears on its airwaves are always excusing their product by saying, "We give the public what it wants." No one rises to refute them because there are no Nielson ratings for what audiences would really like to see/hear. And if there were, it wouldn't prove much because there's no way to opt for what you have never experienced.

There are, however, indications that, given a chance, Americans would pick something better than—or at least different from—what they're getting now. One straw in the wind is the popularity of BBC-produced soap opera, comedy, and drama. Another is the growing response to non-commercial radio.

Radio is more sensitive to listener-reaction because it's cheaper to produce and thus less dependent on Big Advertising. There are more channels—especially on FM—and thus more opportunity for picking and choosing. And in the case of most non-commercial radio, it has to please its listeners or go hungry.

There have been non-commercial stations in the U.S. ever since FM sets appeared on the market. Most are affiliated to some sort of educational institution, though even this type of station is now frequently supported in large part by funds solicited from the public. But thanks to an FCC regulation that reserved a number of frequencies for community use, it has always been possible to establish and operate a community-controlled, or "listener-sponsored" radio station—something that would be almost impossible on TV.

As early as the 1950s, some of the more successful listener-sponsored stations combined in a loose federation that eventually became Pacifica Broadcasting. The group—which now includes five stations—shares on a use-what-you-like basis the material



Alternative networks give public a chance

Listener sponsored radio offers better programs and freer discussion of public concern.

produced by each, and gets limited financial and technical aid from a private foundation. KPFA and KPFA, the Berkeley and Los Angeles stations, fought successful defense actions against political repression, triggered by their inclusion of radical commentators during the '60s.

►A real national network.

But not until 1970 was there a real national network of such stations with a central organization dedicated to "producing, acquiring, and distributing" high quality programs for a token yearly fee, now \$100.

National Public Radio (funded by a small slice of the funds Congress allocates to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting) has grown from the original 90 member stations to 200. Its coverage reaches from Alaska to Puerto Rico. Seventy percent of its stations are licensed to universities or colleges, which pick up some of the tab. The rest are licensed to public and state school systems, public library systems, or community organizations. In practically all cases, listeners contribute a vital part of the budget and share the responsibility for policy-making.

NPR does not cover all non-commercial, community radio in the U.S. To join the network a station must meet certain minimum standards, which are constantly being revised upwards:

- A broadcast day of at least 18 hours, 365 days a year;
- a full-time staff of at least five persons;
- a budget of at least \$75,000 a year;
- power of at least 250 watts for AM, 3000 watts for FM.

Any station that meets these criteria can join NPR and avail itself of its weekly 36 (approximately) hours of programming: news, commentary, educational material, music and cultural discussions. The rest of the 126 hours must be filled by the member station's own resources or acquired elsewhere.

The NPR contribution is of remarkably high quality and variety, although it tends to be a little high-brow in its musical selections (opera, symphony, some jazz, and a good deal of ethnic-folk) and in its "informational" programming. One weekly feature called "Options" uses lectures from the Brookings Institute and the Chautauqua series and bills itself as a "free univer-

sity of the air."

Of wider appeal is NPR's full coverage of Congressional and other government hearings and major speeches delivered at the Washington Press Club. Top banana in the news department is unquestionably the hour-and-a-half "All Things Considered," which has won the prestigious Peabody Award for overall excellence and the Ohio University Award for one of its anchorpersons, Susan Stamberg. A new series called "Pauline Frederick and Colleagues" will headline the veteran U.N. correspondent and a changing panel of experts on foreign and domestic news.

As it heads into 1977, NPR is geared to an attack on the problem of "lack of public awareness." Even in those parts of the country best served by member stations, there is a vast public that doesn't know NPR exists or what it has to offer. Also there is shaping up a struggle for a larger cut of the CPB budget pie.

►"Radio Free Radio." Meanwhile, a new national network of non-commercial stations is getting its act together and pressing CPB on another flank.

"Poor People's Radio," or "Public Access Radio," or "Rad-

io Free Radio"—call it what you will—is a wildly heterogeneous collection of non-commercial stations that either do not meet the "minimum standards" of NPR or do not choose to affiliate for other reasons.

From 10-watt local "radio freaks" to some of the powerful Pacifica stations, the 50 members of the new National Federation of Community Broadcasters have little in common except the lack of institutional sponsorship. They offer each other a service called Possible Tape Exchange; a yearly meeting at which to air problems and explore answers; and an ably articulated attack on CPB's "exclusionary" policies.

The problem is not simply that poor, weak, understaffed stations can't avail themselves of the goodies provided by taxpayer money—though this is a legitimate beef. There is also, as of 1976, a direct subsidy paid out of CPB funds to listener-sponsored stations who meet NPR standards. For every dollar such stations can raise from their listeners, CPB will pay them 12 cents. It adds up. And as the NFCB critics see it, it's another case of the rich getting richer at the public trough.

This controversy can't do anything but good from the viewpoint of NPR as well as NFCB. The more hassle, the more publicity, and the more likely that the short-changed American audience will become aware of its power.

Public radio under any aegis offers more than an alternative to commercial programming. It is the last open road to free communication between different sections of the community, uncensored by government, network, or advertising executives.

The citizenry can still squeeze on to its own airwaves if it will only organize itself to seize the time.

—Janet Stevenson